Alfaville, or the Utopics of Mel Bochner

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Published in:
Grey Room

Publication date:
2003

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Sometimes reality is too complex. Fiction gives it form.
—Alpha 60[1]

Narrative gives more than form to reality, it bestows meaning on that reality. Narrative is consumed in the world, Roland Barthes once wrote, but the reverse also holds true: the world is consumed as a narrative.[2] Imagine then, if you will, the confusion of a reader who, on turning to page fourteen in the May 1968 issue of *Arts Magazine,* happens upon a text called *Alfaville, Godard's Apocalypse.* Our surprised reader is presented with nothing that would ordinarily go by the name of narrative. *Alfaville* passes itself off as a review of Godard's *Alphaville,* a movie that had its premiere in 1965, but it seems more adequate to describe this discursive object as an extended exercise in estrangement.[3]

Alfaville was authored by Mel Bochner, although it remains to be seen what the notion of author means in his case. The text forms a composite affair, which defies easy categorization. The text does not fully set itself apart from other genres of writing, such as art criticism or the sociological essay. That it might faintly look like something we already know is part of its lure. Yet, it is also clear that the text is structured in a multiple fashion: it resembles as much a table of contents (i.e., the table *is* the concrete text) as it does an index table (i.e., the table refers to a text that is *elsewhere*); it reads as an inventory of data that were amassed by the author and as a compilation of quotes drawn from other sources. *Alfaville,* in short, insists on its own inability to complete the summation not only of the text of Godard's *Alphaville,* but also of the larger text it literally inhabits: the discursive spaces of information.

Even though an incomplete tale, *Alfaville* does remind us of a narrative we are fond of telling ourselves in order to give form to the reality of the sixties. This story concerns how the development of postindustrial society reached a point of critical mass. This postmodern scenario has proven trustworthy in its explanatory power, but the strength of this historical model can, at times, also be its weakness. The historical fiction of postmodernism necessarily operates on an ideological level; that is to say, it provides both an explanation and a representation of our imaginary relationship to the real conditions of existence. Hence, the elements of science fiction that

Grey Room 10, Winter 2003, pp. 76–111.

Mel Bochner. *Alfaville*, 1968.
Detail.

can cling to such narratives. I am thinking, in particular, of those totalizing representations of the information age, such as the euphoric globalism of Marshall McLuhan or the critical dystopia of Guy Debord, which emerged during the period itself. We have since come to understand that the more interesting narratives of postmodernity will not only resist this homogeneous view of cultural experience, they will also reinstate a multiplicity of subjective, discursive, and institutional positions within the cultural realm; they will acknowledge the unevenness of historical time with its coexistence of different technical and economic moments, and they will view technology not only as an instrument of disciplinary power. In short, such narratives will not give up on the dialectic of utopia and critique but on the desire to achieve a final synthesis of the dialectic. *Alfaville,* I submit, offers such a tentative mode of narrative, as well.

Let me proceed to situate *Alfaville* upon a more limited scale of historical events. When he wrote *Alfaville,* Mel Bochner was a young artist who had previously written art criticism in support of minimal art.[4] He formed part of a milieu of postminimalist artists, such as Robert Smithson and Dan Graham, whose work participated in a migration of artistic practice into the spaces of information, both old and new, already under way in Pop art. I am referring, for instance, to the use of the film and video media, but also the adoption of the magazine as a site of presentation. Importantly, Bochner, Smithson, and Graham viewed the mass media as more than a means of distribution, they were involved in an active disturbance of the media's protocols and codes.[5] There is an aspect of subversion and mimicry at work in such examples as Graham's *Homes for America* (1966), Smithson's *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* (1967), or *The Domain of the Great Bear* (1966), which was coauthored by Smithson and Bochner. These magazine works overturned and transgressed the discursive principles of the magazine article at a time when the "artist's page" had not yet become a standard feature of art magazines.

My focus will remain on *Alfaville* in the following pages, and I shall not be concerned with locating *Alfaville* within the expanded field of magazine works.[6] Nevertheless, the informational network that *Alfaville* taps into is of a dizzyingly large dimension. I shall identify the main subtext of *Alfaville,* however, to be the genre of science fiction and, by extension, utopian fiction. Godard's *Alphaville* is first and foremost a science fiction movie, although it also passes itself off as many other things. In this sense the confusion of genres in Godard's cinema reveals a close affinity to the strategy of the magazine pieces by Bochner and others. Indeed *Alphaville,* which carried the subtitle *A Strange Adventure of Lemmy Caution,* dissimulated what the spectator thought he or she knew: not only the

conventional forms of cinema, but also the everyday reality of Paris. Bochner's *Alfaville* is engaged in a similar act of defamiliarization. In fact, *Alfaville* does not let the viewer miss this point, since Bertolt Brecht's name is inscribed on its surface more than once. We might say, first of all, that *Alfaville* estranges *Alphaville* from itself. In a certain sense *Alfaville* becomes a remake of *Alphaville*. Yet *Alfaville* also functions as an alienation of its own setting. On its own intimate scale *Alfaville* defamiliarizes the magazine page itself, but the alienation device of *Alfaville* also operates on the larger scale of its sociohistorical context. Yet, the critical detachment once sought by Brecht also begins to break down in *Alfaville,* and we shall need to explore what this loss of distance implies for Bochner's critical project.

Mapping *Alfaville*

Utopic practice is an architectonics, an art of systems.
—Louis Marin[7]

Alfaville occupies four consecutive pages in *Arts Magazine,* and the continuity of its space is interrupted only at the margins where the folio numbers and publication data appear. Bochner mapped out the double page spreads of *Alfaville* according to the regularity of a three-column grid subdivided into four horizontal rows. The artist created thereby an impression of great uniformity, even rigidity in the layout. Yet even this apparent simplicity of the typographic grid masks a greater complexity. The checkered structure of *Alfaville* delineates a multiple space of semantic relationships, which catch the reader/viewer in their maze. Indeed, it is this remarkable ability of *Alfaville* to articulate at once the most uniform and most heterogeneous of spaces that makes it such a compelling work.

Following good modernist practice, *Alfaville*'s grid forms a device of self-reflexivity. It points to its own physical surface of support, but simultaneously the incursion of the words and images within the field of the grid dispel any illusion of the work being selfsame. On one level *Alfaville* forms a site-specific object of discourse since it exists only *in this place.* Perhaps one reason that *Alfaville* remains a lesser-known work is that it exists only in one place, namely in the May 1968 issue of *Art Magazine.*[8] Yet, on another level *Alfaville* functions as a discursive event in which *nothing takes place* but the dispersions of language itself. Accordingly, we might say that *Alfaville*'s narrative, in so far as such a thing exists, never arrives at any definite place.[9]

The grid of *Alfaville* establishes a continuous visual ground to the work, but it also works to fragment the text. In this sense Bochner's layout does not negate the standard typographic practice of the magazine but inverts its aesthetic principles. A functionalist decree

Alfaville,
Godard's Apocalypse

by MEL BOCHNER

"Torpor is the enemy."—Eca de Quieroz

A centrally located circular light, too intense to look at, blinks on and off at regular intervals. The sound track opens in a raspy, monotone:
"Sometimes . . . reality . . . is . . . too . . . complex . . .
Fiction . . . gives . . . it . . . form . . ."

"In a series of pictures he transforms the nothingness of listless and uniform days into an oppressive condition of repugnancy, boredom, false hopes, paralyzing disappointments and piteous fears. Nothing happens but that nothing becomes heavy—a grey and random human destiny moving towards its end." Erich Auerbach on Flaubert's Madame Bovary.

Alphaville Locations: Deserted lobbies, parking lots, shopping plazas, cloverleaf intersections, curtain-wall buildings, self-service elevators, hotel bathrooms, phone booths, circular staircases, highways around large cities, a bedroom with a juke box.

"My movies are blocks."—Jean-Luc Godard.
CAST:
Lemmy Caution.....Eddie Constantine
Natasha von Braun.....Anna Karina
Henri Dickson.....Akim Tamiroff

Alfaville ——— society of the present-future ——— ruled by a mad physicist outcast from earth ——— governed by a computer, "Alfa 60," which acts always in the "common good" ——— phenomena maintained by a "crisis constant" ——— the state provides strangers with women ——— anxiety as an operational value ——— behaviorism ——— drive—cue—response—reward ———. For Alfa 60 the boundary of life is language———. "There is nothing else to experience except words; as long as words keep their meanings and meaning its words" ——— political executions are carried out in a swimming pool.

Natasha and Lemmy suffering dumbly from certain external and unintelligible strains.

Lemmy: *This book you call The Bible . . . it's a dictionary.*
Natasha: *Is there a difference?*

"Logic pervades the world:
the limits of the world
are also its limits."
—Wittgenstein

If words define experience, then behavior becomes subject to the problems of language . . . tautology, conundrum, diffusion, paradox, ambiguity, contradiction, vicious circle.

Words are suspect, the dictionary is altered at the whim of the "authorities," convention collapses. Communication ceases. Thought becomes impossible. Symbols separate from their assigned meanings, questions go unanswered, answers go unquestioned, words substitute for action. Action becomes impossible. Stasis.

Wherever Lemmy Caution goes he takes snapshots with a Kodak Instamatic Camera and flashcube attachment.

A sign caught in the headlights:
LOGIC: SILENCE

Mel Bochner. *Alfaville*, 1968. As published in *Arts Magazine* (May 1968).

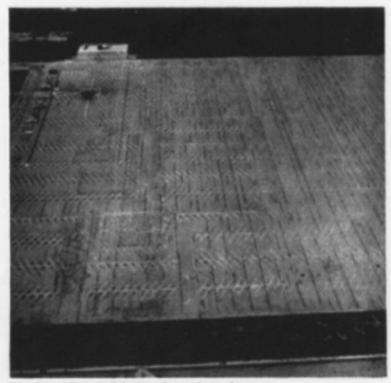
Surfaces: A. The film *coarse, grainy, uneven, pocked.* *B. Object matter* *hard, brittle, smooth, reflective.* *1. transparent* *glass, pleziglas.* *2. opaque* *stainless steel, poured concrete, aluminum, formica, chrome.*	Eddie Constantine is numbed by a powerful sottishness as he moves down the labyrinthian corridors of Alfaville. His mind is sluggish and opaque. Lassitude. His face is parched and immobile. His body heavy, virtually stagnant. His reactions slow and tepid, he acts, it seems, out of nothing more than a slightly roused boredom. His avowal of humanist values such as love and personal feeling are all the more disproportionate.	*"Perhaps all pleasure is only relief."* —William Burroughs "There seems a certainty in degradation." —T. E. Lawrence *"The love of life is the kiss of death."* —Ad Reinhardt "If you look at something long enough, I've discovered that the meaning goes away."—Andy Warhol
"Once we have devised computers with a genuine capacity for self-improvement, a rapid evolutionary process will begin. As the machine improves both itself and its model of itself, we shall begin to see all the phenomena associated with the terms 'consciousness,' 'intuition' and 'intelligence' . . . it is unreasonable to think machines	*could become nearly as intelligent as we are and then stop, or to suppose we will always be able to compete with them. Whether or not we could retain some sort of control of the machines, assuming that we would want to, the nature of our activities and aspirations would be changed utterly by the presence on earth of intellectually superior beings."*—M. L. Minsky	Shots: A. Frames cut off, casual, often missing the action, static, exaggerated angles (in the manner of TV news coverage), discontinuous. B. Tonality washed-out grays over- or under-exposed, random negative footage, irregular patches of extreme dark or light.

Godard as the Law.

Systems of tentative paralysis.

On the perimeter of the city live those who cannot conform. In this gray zone Lemmy locates his old friend Henry Dickson, a fellow "Outlander," living in a sleazy hotel. On the stairs Lemmy asks, "Is Dick Tracy dead? Is Flash Gordon still alive?" Once inside the dilapidated room he is forced to hide behind a chest of drawers while a beautiful, scantily clad girl (a state prostitute and spy) offers herself to the old man. While engaged in preliminary love-making, the old man is seized by a heart attack. His last words to Lemmy: "Save those who weep."	*The implications of* Alphaville *are moralistic. Godard opts for humanist values in the context of his projection of "technologism." He sees* Alphaville *as present and apocalyptic. The erasure of individuality and personality, or what Lemmy Caution calls "poetry," he views as tragic. Godard's "sociology" is exceedingly romanticized. Man has already been displaced from the center of the universe.*	*"You must never say* why; *only* because." —Natasha von Braun "Time is a circle, the descending arc is the past, the ascending arc the future, there is only the present."—Alpha 60 *"Time is never a corruption or even a catastrophe, but merely a change of place, a hideout for data."*—Roland Barthes

Barriers of reflection.



"Parking lots." Ed Ruscha, photo/Aeanis.

In Alphaville there is no time. The clock is a circle and time is the measurement of the movements on its "face." "Before" in relation to "after" is the character of time. "Before" and "after" are divisions of "time" separated by "now." But "now" as a "part" of time is unavailable. It has no duration, and the bleak search for the "present" becomes the interminable "past." At that juncture time stops.

"The movies are a world of fragments."
—Jean-Luc Godard

Political executions are carried out in the swimming pool. The person to be executed, hands tied, is led to the edge of the diving board. Around the balcony various officials look on. The condemned man generally makes a short speech about freedom, existence or human solidarity. The strange hollow sound of his words is punctuated by a burst of machine-gun bullets. After he falls into the water, a bevy of girls gracefully dive in after him and, if necessary, finish the execution with knives.

Catatonia in the "Capital of Pain."

Phenomena of consciousness.

Alias William Burroughs.

Godard's eschatology is conventional within the tradition of "crisis" literature and art of the twentieth century. Yeats, Pound, Wyndham Lewis, all envisioned the Apocalypse and an ensuing "renovation out of decadence." They confronted it with the posture of authoritarianism; the Surrealists, in turn, preferred pseudo-anarchism. More recently, artists such as Warhol have presented an attitude of passivity. In his movies Warhol demonstrates a preoccupation with the more fictive elements of "crisis" by presenting everything as stereotype. Even more interesting than Warhol are the movies of Roger Corman, especially his *Wild Angels*. Unlike Godard, he makes no assessments of the "contemporary malaise"; his concern is only with appearances and the surface of things. The *Wild Angel* motorcyclists are complete fabrications, only tangentially based in fact. When Corman's characters speak, motives do not exist. Nancy Sinatra, a motorcycle gang girl, in reply to her boyfriend's question "How have I changed?" says, "I don't know . . . it's just kinda weird." The audience is distanced by banality and what Brecht refers to as the "alienation effect." Godard, on the other hand, eschews the artificial and attempts to portray believable human feelings. He asks that we forego theatricality and believe emotionally in the plight of a "hero" and "heroine" who are themselves in a state of disbelief.

**Mel Bochner. *Alfaville*, 1968.
As published in *Arts Magazine*
(May 1968).**

Fictitious excess within rigid boundaries: "Corman's Wild Angels"

"Never show reality. If a man must travel over land, use land that has been burned up in a forest fire. Preferably he should journey over or past water, because water has a dreamlike quality. And there must be fog and fire . . . The function of the camera is to portray reality, but I like to show that much reality is unreal."

—Roger Corman

"The alienation effect consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware of from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking, and unexpected. What is obvious is in a certain sense made incomprehensible. Before familiarity can turn into awareness, the familiar must be stripped of its inconspicuousness; we must give up assuming that the object in question needs no explanation. However frequently recurrent, modest, vulgar it may be, it will now be labeled as something unusual . . . an alienation of the automobile takes place if after driving a modern car for a long while we drive an old model T-Ford. Suddenly we hear explosions once more; the motor works on the principle of explosions. We start feeling annoyed that such a vehicle can move; in short, we understand cars, by looking at them as something strange, new, as a triumph of engineering and to that extent something unnatural. Nature, which certainly embraces the automobile, is suddenly imbued with an element of unnaturalness, and from now on this is an indelible part of the concept of nature."

—Berthold Brecht

Urban dis-location.

Contrivances of experience.

"[In] The last scene of the film . . . Natasha tells Lemmy that she loves him, but pronounces it as a child speaks its first words. She has been reborn, and for them both a normal human life is possible again."

—Jean-Luc Godard

Godard suggests a morality which is at best questionable, for finally any "values" based on "normal human life" versus "cold, inhuman computer" are contrived. The old conventions of ethics and rationality are all used up.

"Everything has been said before."

—Alpha 60

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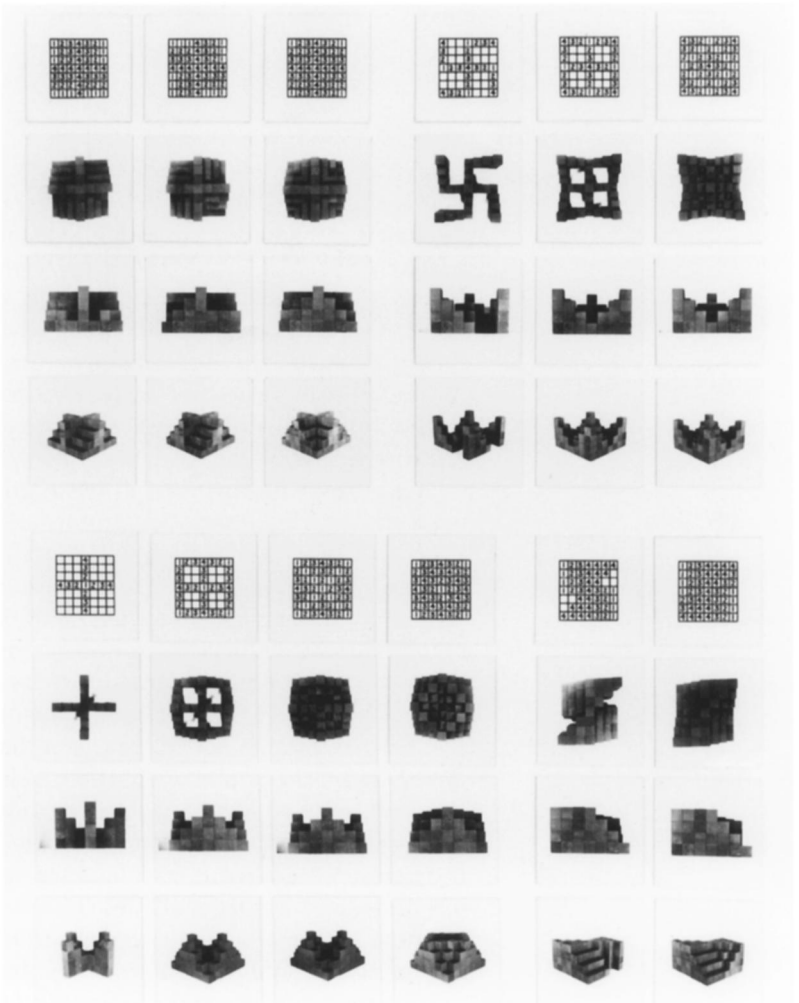
of readability would dictate that the typographic grid function as a nonobtrusive tool of visual organization, but Bochner's emphatic use of rule lines to demarcate the page into separate blocks distinctly flouted this elementary law of design. Bochner foregrounded the grid in *Alfaville* in order to obtain a division *within* the text rather than as a means to establish its linear continuity. He situated, that is, the text at a formal level of segmentation that precluded the containment of narrative order within the unity of a singular, perspectival viewpoint.

Hence the inescapable impression that *Alfaville* makes on the viewer as a highly static and artificial construct.[10] We might say that Bochner's piece estranges us from the narrative situation that we customarily settle into during our encounters with the mass media, whether this situation is inaugurated by our turning on the television or our opening of the pages of a magazine. But, then again, Bochner deliberately plays off such conventions. That is to say, he does not seek to invent new protocols of reading, which might deflect or supplant those imposed by the mass media. Such was the enterprise undertaken by modernist literature, and it is quite likely that Bochner was familiar with the combinatory and performative strategies of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Book* or even the typographical experiments of Michel Butor.[11] However, *Alfaville* does not seek to establish an *alternative* protocol, which after all is contained within the very narrative system it seeks to oppose. *Alfaville,* rather, seeks to expose the duplicities and contradictions of the narrative system as such.

Narrative is an integrative structure that proceeds in consecutive, incremental steps. It might do so swiftly, or it might delay the chain of events, spin out its logical thread of space and time. For instance, detective stories make frequent use of so-called "baffling" signs, which not only draw out the suspense but also present the reader with misleading signs of direction.[12] Godard's *Alphaville* belongs, among other things, to this detective genre, and Bochner's account of the movie is particularly sensitive to its phenomenal aspects of dilation and indirection. He describes the main character of the movie, for instance, as being "numbed by a powerful sottishness as he moves down the labyrinthine corridors of Alfaville. His mind is sluggish and opaque. Lassitude." Bochner's summary of the narrative thus slows down itself in the process of picturing a cinematic atmosphere heavy with lethargy. Bochner's sentences do not lead anywhere, but are stretched thin to the point of breakage. Language is fragmented into snippets of sentences and words, a world splintered into so many bits of information and objectified "phenomena of consciousness," scattered through a labyrinthine space, like Godard's "dumbly suffering" subjects.

But the process of disintegration does not eclipse all appearance of order. On the one hand, *Alfaville* still holds up a world to our view.



Mel Bochner. *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams*, 1966. Thirty-six gelatin silver prints and twelve pen-and-ink drawings mounted on board, 73 x 55".

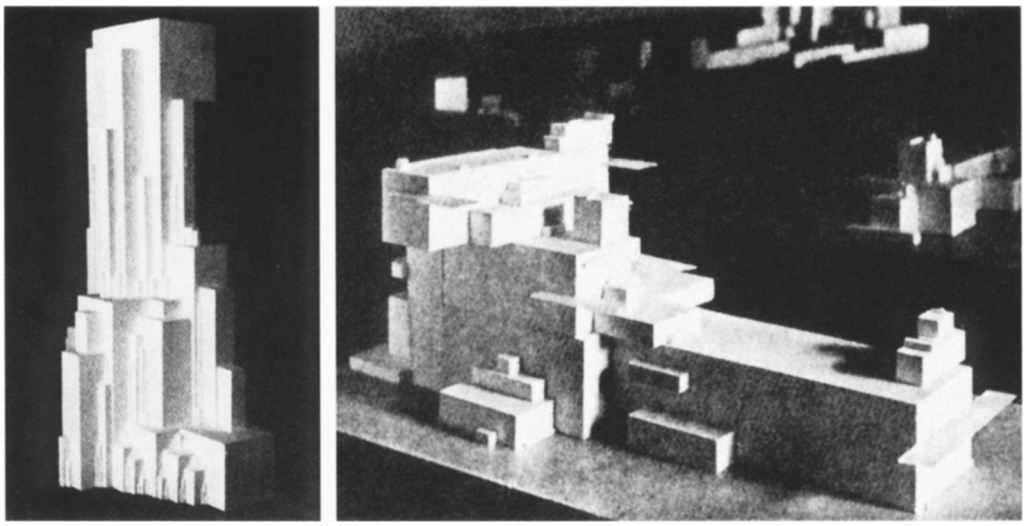
It might be a depleted, dispirited, and dystopic world where even the hero "acts out of nothing more than a slightly roused boredom," but it is a world that we can imagine inhabiting and which we might or might not identify with our own reality. On the other hand, we must not let this imaginary level of Bochner's *Alfaville* distract us from its structural logic, which thrives on contradiction. In order to clarify this point, I propose that we describe *Alfaville* as a kind of *model;* that is, as a model of the text, a model of *Alphaville*, and a model of the world. Perhaps this tactic might seem to open the way to further confusion; however, let us not mistake this notion of the model with a kind of blueprint of reality. *Not models for something, but models of something*—formed Bochner's agenda.[13] It follows that the model, for Bochner, does not represent a perfect plan to be realized, but forms something both abstract and concrete.

I feel emboldened to invoke this notion of the model in the context of Bochner's work for a number of reasons. First of all, the model has been operative in Bochner's practice since 1966. It initially appears in a photographic work called *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams,* which displays a systemic set of structures built from identical

wooden cubes.[14] The original impetus behind the photo work was documentary. For an exhibition Bochner wanted to re-create a daily task he had set himself over a period of several months: constructing different arrangements of wooden cubes on his desk. Each day he dismantled the old structure in order to build a new one. The only remaining record was a set of numerical diagrams. Bochner hired a professional photographer to shoot a few reconstructed versions of the diagrams. This work manifests therefore the *structural* nature of the model, which establishes a narrative by articulating a set of invariant units (like the "blocks" of *Alfaville*). Bochner's procedure clearly derived from the permutational systems of Minimalism, but it was also born of a desire to defeat all illusionism in the work. The result, however, was to be different than the artist anticipated.

Bochner quickly realized that the redoubling of *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* onto itself resulted in a variety of unexpected effects, not the least being that a pervasive "illusion of literalism" had canceled the wished for presence of "anti-illusionism."[15] It was not that *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* had become all illusion but that the work seemed to open up an indeterminate space between the purely illusional and the purely literal. Since this self-contradictory status of the work has been examined in detail elsewhere, it will suffice to state that *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* not only took place, as it were, *between* the images (as no single camera angle summed up the whole), but that each image revealed many incongruities *within* itself (such as multiple shadows and optical distortions). In short, *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* juxtaposes a set of representational systems, both discursive and visual, that cannot be made to fully overlap. The work opens a differential gap between these procedures of the map and narrative, the diagram and perspective. Thus, in the last instance, we might conclude that the model operates in a *nonstructural* manner because it does not resolve all contradictions upon a narrative level (in contrast to the mythical structure of ideology), but foregrounds these conflicts in the dispersions of its system.

It is important to understand that the conflicts that Bochner's model sets into motion are not only of a perceptual or spatial kind but are temporal and historical as well. Perhaps this is more evident in *Alfaville,* where we come across the names of Flaubert, Wittgenstein, and Godard, all on the same page. However, *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* also encapsulates different historical moments within itself. There is one such moment that I wish to point out, a particularly pregnant one that will enable me to draw a link between the model and the figure of utopia. Bochner has suggested a precedent for his models in the *Arkhitektonics* of Kasimir Malevich. He knew Malevich's models from the illustrations in Camilla Gray's *The Russian Experiment in Art:* a book that had been instrumental in introduc-



Kasimir Malevich, *Arkhitektonics*, 1924–28. Original illustration from Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962).

ing the constructivist legacy to the (post)minimalist generation.[16] While Bochner was fascinated by the images in Gray's book, there is little value in suggesting a formal parallel between the models of Bochner and Malevich. The true analogy resides on an architectural and, by extension, *utopian* level, because Malevich's works were utopian to the extreme, lacking any possible means of execution. What struck Bochner most about the *Arkhitektonics* was that the Russian artist gave no consideration to such practical matters as where to place a window or a door. That is the reason why the *Arkhitektonics* appear to be utterly without scale.[17] It is this lack of ratio in *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* that Bochner's model holds in common with the *Arkhitektonics.*[18]

For an object to have no scale is another way of saying that an object exists in a kind of nonplace, in a space beyond measure. Furthermore, to provide the lineaments of such an impossible nonspace, as Louis Marin has demonstrated, is of the essence of the utopian figure.[19] Utopia does not belong to the functional level of social or political discourse, but displaces reality into an *other place,* outside the actual boundaries of geographic space and historical time. Marin describes this other place as an in-determined place, which means to say that it *transforms* and *displaces* the imaginary relations we entertain with our real conditions of existence. The proper sign of utopic discourse will therefore be an incessant exchange between the dual terms of fiction versus reality, topography versus history, author versus narrator.[20] Utopic discourse is truly a dialogic discourse, a kind of disputation, just as Bochner's own compilation pieces, of which *Alfaville* forms but one example, are constructed as a kind of "dialogue" between different voices.[21] We need, therefore, to differentiate between a utopic practice that sets out to intensify and systematically work over the ideological contradictions within the social domain and the utopic figure, which would project a simulacral image of a perfect society.[22] It is the former model of a utopic practice that will hold my interest.

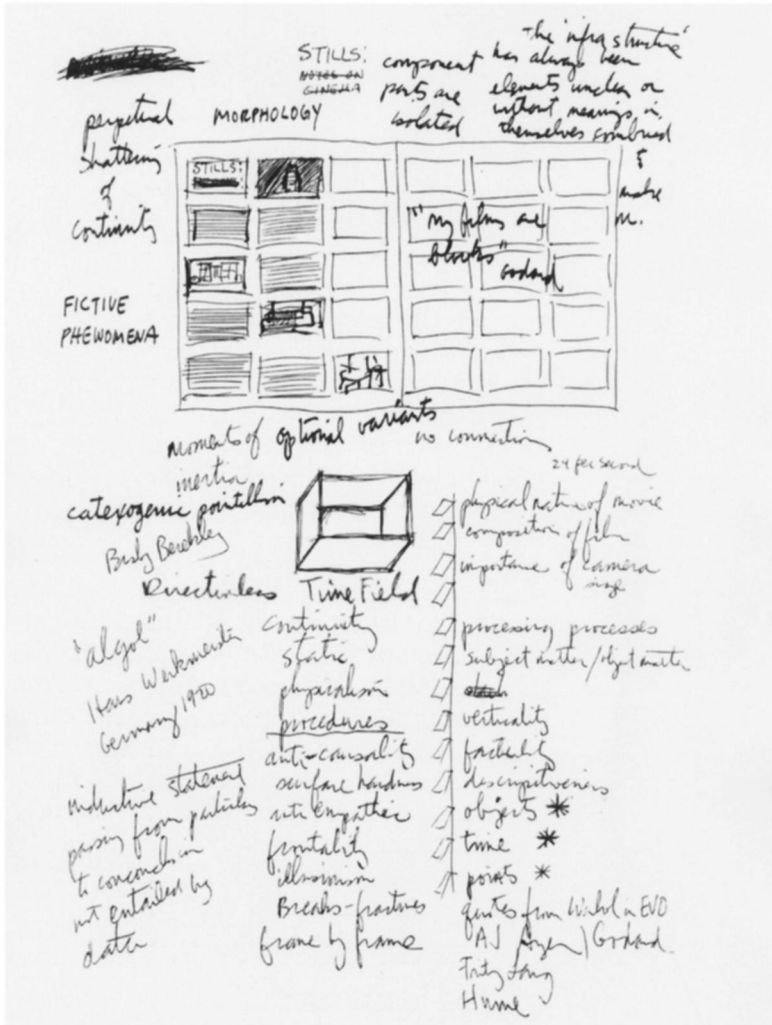
As Marin argues, the interplay of fiction and history in utopic practice is governed by a structural logic of neutralization.[23] I shall

have to be brief on this subject. For our purposes it is sufficient to recognize that the *neutral figure* forms a supplementary third term that edges itself between the two extremities of a contradiction. It designates a zero degree of opposition, therefore, instead of a dialectical synthesis of opposites. I have indicated that a similar process of neutralization is at work in *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams.* In contrast to Malevich, however, the utopic practice of Bochner has become detached from the utopian figure. *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* stretches its perceptual contradictions across its multiple surface. There is no total perspective on the whole, no coherence to its spatial narrative. In short, Bochner's models figure forth a necessarily incomplete act of representation:

> The notion of completion is at fault. What is experienced and what is known continually replace each other. Nothing reveals itself without at the same time concealing something else. The concealed is the source of thought. And thought, which we hope to use to "fill in the gaps" is in itself bottomless or . . . incomplete.[24]

The relationship of *Alfaville* to *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* is now easily brought into focus. Dan Graham once compared the latter to a "directionless time-field," which is a good description of the procedures of the neutral that reverses the terms of spatial and temporal experience.[25] *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* references, in particular, the protocinematic, spatialized temporality of Eadweard Muybridge's serial photographs.[26] But this neutralizing logic is also very close to the spirit of Godard who pitched a model of "theatrical realism" against the naturalistic illusions of *cinéma verité.* One of Godard's most oft-quoted remarks is that "life and the unreal are inseparable. If you begin with life you find unreality behind, and vice versa."[27]

An earlier draft for *Alfaville* was called *Stills: Notes on Cinema.* Across several vertical columns of text and images, in the artist's scrawling handwriting, we decipher Godard's phrase: "My films are blocks."[28] In the margins of the drawing is written: "The infrastructure has always been elements unclear or without meanings in themselves combined and made one" and "component parts are isolated." Bochner deconstructs film, therefore, in a systematic manner similar to the procedures of *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams.* Film functions as a model of reality in a return of the myth of total cinema, but with a twist. The ontological notion of a total cinema held that a total representation of life was possible, even though the ideal had to be postponed into infinity. A total cinema would exist, therefore, in depth as a synthesis or composite of all possible perspectives, but Bochner's simulation of a total cinema exists as a surface where one does not compose but simply selects from the



Mel Bochner. *Stills: Notes on Cinema*, 1967. Notebook page with drawings, 11 x 8½".

available stock footage: "Vertical progression of horizontal images—a cancelation. Time is many points, all times and all movies have the same number of points." But this system of fragments is incomplete and conflicted—"order breaks down of its own accord because it is a superimposition."[29] *Alfaville* thus renders the "perspectival shattering of continuity."

A formal analysis of *Alfaville* reveals that the regularity of the grid masks an underlying pattern of systemic contradictions. Any organizational rule that is discovered in a subset will not carry over to the whole. For instance, some parts of the text flow over into the next box, while others do not, and some paragraphs are aligned at the top, others at the center or bottom of the block. These shifting relations of congruence and opposition are repeated on the level of the images, which forms a secondary system that is partially superimposed and partially integrated within the total space of the text. Within one horizontal strip of images, Bochner might suggest various formal or dynamic relationships of repetition and reversal, while at the synoptic level of the whole spread he will intimate further possibilities of a symmetrical or diametrical kind, as if

imitating the rhythms of filmic montage itself. Indeed, we might say that *Alfaville* forms a kind of model of cinema.

Godard once suggested what he thought the ideal format of film criticism should be.[30] First of all, he asserted that criticism should shed its formalist preoccupation with problems of style. Instead, a writer should engage in what Godard called "instructional criticism" by juxtaposing images and commentary in such a manner that the commentary *on* the image would form part *of* the image. "One could imagine," the filmmaker offered, "criticism similar to Michel Butor's novels, which are more or less critical commentaries on events. The criticism would be the dialogue of the film, with photographs or comments: the whole thing would comprise a critical analysis of the film."[31] Indeed the essay would be structured in its totality as a conversation or dialogue between the various levels of word and image, film and critic, and, we might add, text and reader. Clearly Godard's thoughts on criticism reflected his own beginning as a film critic, and it is well known how he compared filmmaking to the writing of critical essays.[32] Bochner's *Alfaville* answers closely to Godard's proposition. Yet *Alfaville* is not a tribute but a critique of Godard. Before we take up a discussion of Bochner's disputation, however, I shall need to address the place of the neutral in *Alphaville*.

Godard and the Law

It was 24 hours, 17 minutes Oceanic Time when I arrived at the suburbs of Alphaville.[33]

The voice is that of Eddie Constantine, alias Lemmy Caution, who describes his own close-up image as it appears on screen. We see him behind the wheel of his white Ford Galaxie, driving through the deserted streets of a nocturnal metropolis. As he waits for a traffic light to change, he lights a cigarette and transfers a gun from the glove box into his pocket. Then, caught in the headlights of his car, a road sign becomes visible: *Alphaville. Silence. Logic.* Lemmy Caution, with the viewer in tow, has arrived at the city of destination. I shall interrupt the narrative at this point, however. We shall be less concerned with the convoluted adventures of Lemmy Caution in Alphaville-the-city than the uncanny transformations that the movie sets in motion within the spatiotemporal field of our actual, historical experience.

Eddie Constantine is the name of an American actor who had attained star status in France during the 1950s while acting in a series of B-grade movies. He was especially known in his role as a secret agent, Lemmy Caution, modeled on the hardboiled detective of the American film noir, but by 1965 Constantine/Caution had

come to seem a holdover from a previous, spent era of cinematic glory.[34] This used-up sense of time was what attracted Godard to Constantine and, by extension, to the serial genre of the detective and science fiction movie.

In *Alphaville* Lemmy Caution travels under the alias of Ivan Johnson, reporter for the *Figaro-Pravda*. "Lemmy Caution" constitutes, therefore, a kind of double or nonperson; he is neither one (Constantine) nor the other (Johnson). In short, Lemmy Caution embodies through this split condition the place of the neutral. Hence, Caution's trouble decoding the secret messages he receives, but also the viewer's difficulties following Caution's path through the circular, mirrored maze of Alphaville's space.[35] Caution's gestures, as Bochner notes, appear to lack inner volition: "His mind is sluggish and opaque. . . . His body heavy, virtually stagnant." Yet, cutting through this inertia, without warning, are sudden acts of irrational violence. While such unprovoked deeds of aggression parody the gratuitous violence that is typical of the *film noir* genre, they also form a symptom of the antagonistic core of the Caution character.[36]

> *Where you find the Red Star Hotel . . . in no way can it be compared to our splendid passages, all glittering . . . with luxury and light. It is merely a huge, tall, narrow, labyrinth . . .*[37]

Constantine's voice-over narrates the "strange adventures" of Lemmy Caution from a temporal distance, but this framing device does not provide the spectator with a unified perspective on Alphaville-the-city. In fact, Constantine is not the only internal commentator of the movie. Preceding the establishing shot of *Alphaville* is a voice-over by Alpha 60, the central computer of Alphaville, who conveys the epigrammatic phrase that introduces the present essay.[38] Alpha 60 appears here not only in the guise of a movie character—the evil opponent of our hero Lemmy Caution—but as a shorthand representation of the cinematic apparatus, because the computer's presence is represented by a burst of stroboscopic light, as if we were peering into the beam of the projector. In a self-critical gesture, the myth of Alpha 60—the total rationalization of the real—is revealed as similar to the classic, narrative law of the cinematic medium itself. From the outset, therefore, *Alphaville* is articulated in a double fashion. Caution will destroy Alpha 60 in the end. Nonetheless, it is Alpha 60 who announces the subsequent chain of events, which are narrated after-the-fact by Caution/Constantine.

This incoherence at the level of the narrator implies that the linearity of the plot will not ensure a diegetic unity of space and time. The mythical Alphaville is a capital city situated in a remote and dark galaxy, yet to some contemporary spectators a more-than-passing resemblance with the wintry streets of Paris would be apparent.

Alphaville is the double of Paris, which enables Paris to see itself as other than the way it normally sees itself:

> In this way each of Lemmy's reports can be used to compile a documentary on the town and its inhabitants. These images will be true documentary images of present-day life. But our story will sometimes deviate from their *sens primitifs* to give it a novel, rather strange, mysterious quality.[39]

Alphaville not only distantiates Paris from itself but also projects a negative, reverse image of Paris. These neutralizing operations of distancing and reversal entail that the distance between things becomes difficult to gauge for the viewer. At some times the gap between the mythical Alphaville and the historical Paris will appear in all its otherness. At other times the two places will appear to seamlessly coincide. Alphaville is a *plural* (or neutral) place; that is to say, its narrative topology cannot be located on any existing map, nor could we ever conceive of such a map. Yet, at the same time, this does not mean that Alphaville resides completely in an imaginary *elsewhere,* among the cluster of dream images of some catastrophic future. Alphaville-the-city is the figure of a narrative operation (i.e., *Alphaville*-the-movie), which works over the semantic units or clichés of reality. "Wherever Lemmy Caution goes," Bochner writes, "he takes snapshots with a Kodak Instamatic Camera and flashcube attachment."

To describe Alphaville as plural, therefore, is to indicate a breakdown of the topographical function of naming and marking a "place." Examples of such nominal markers are the monument or the road sign, which overlays space with a grid of geographic and historical coordinates. *Alphaville* presents such a directional sign at the beginning, but its architectural monuments are not the symbolical landmarks of the past. Godard's city of the future resembles a bureaucratic remodeling of the utopian dream of modernist architecture for the sixties: bright, hygienic, minimal, and uniform.[40] The movie décor does not consist of spaces of inhabitation but of spaces of transit. *Alphaville*'s locations are those of *dis-location;* a paratactic series of "deserted lobbies, parking lots, shopping plazas, cloverleaf intersections, curtain-wall buildings, self-service elevators, hotel bathrooms, phone booths, circular staircases, highways around large cities, a bedroom with a jukebox."

The road sign spells it out for us: *Alphaville. Silence. Logic.* Whoever enters this rationalized space is subjected to constant surveillance. Not only is there no private space, but there is also no private language. Between the sign and its meaning there can be no distance, no noise. Words must *be* what they *appear* to be, dictated by the transcendent authority of Alpha 60—the dictionary is referred to as the Bible in *Alphaville.* But this 1:1 mapping of language onto

reality cannot help but come up against its own limits. The delusions of logic infect the city's citizens with an absolute distrust of the arbitrariness of the sign. As a result, Alphaville's residents dwell in a desert of communication in which one only exchanges clichés, as one exchanges one generic place for another.

> *Natasha: In other words, we minimize the unknowns.*
> *Lemmy: What you mean is, it's not Alphaville you're prattling on about . . . it's Zeroville.*[41]

For the denizens of Alphaville, the city constitutes a space of total reification where all questioning has come to an end. The master computer Alpha 60 is an instrument of disciplinary power, a social feedback mechanism that functions as the arbiter of all human interrelations. All social conflict is eliminated from Alphaville because history has been reduced to the rational computation of probabilities. According to this cybernetic model, experience assumes a tautological nature, expelling the phenomenon of otherness from the social body. Time moves in a perfect circle. The loop is never broken, time does not move beyond itself, as in the phenomenological *ek-stase* or the revolutionary shattering of the historical continuum.[42] Since the thought of exteriority has become impossible in Alphaville, there is no time, as Bochner notes. Action becomes impossible and communication ceases.

Lemmy passes through one wasteland into another. He enters through an intersidereal, deserted *zone* and escapes through it, but let us not think that the rush of images that lie in between and seem filled with the unfamiliar details of a future landscape truly engender the repleteness of another universe. The film does little to conceal the utter banality, the cliché-ridden nature, of its story line; surely we are not being asked to *believe* in the theatrical proceedings, if even for the length of the movie. We might agree that Alpha 60 portrays the potential evils of surveillance and conjecture that the film condemns new technologies of communication, but we would be mistaken to take such a commonplace, such moralism, as the only surface on which the film operates.

Alphaville cannot be fully identified with such a dystopic or catastrophic theme: its infrastructure, to use Bochner's term, is not isomorphic with its superstructure. There are more than a few moments in *Alphaville,* for instance, when the narrative seems to derail. The reality effect of this science fiction movie is a weakened one, to say the very least.[43] The fictional trajectory of *Alphaville* puts several contraries in play, but it does not necessarily affirm one utopic (or dystopic) view of things over the other. To provide an example, *Alphaville* rewrites within the discursive domain of an *other* world the geopolitical terms of conflict that dominated the sixties. This process of neutralization, however, will indicate a rupture in the

very fabric of historical space; that is, it will indicate the fundamental limits of ideological representation. *Alphaville* divides the world into the two axes of north-south and east-west, but these axes do not intersect. The east-west axis belongs to the "Outerworld," whence Lemmy Caution comes, but it also suggests the integration of the Western and Soviet systems on the "galactic" scale of the spectacle. We never actually visit this realm in *Alphaville,* but we readily understand that it signifies a postideological future in the guise of a nominal conflation of New York and Moscow, Ivan and Johnson, Figaro and Pravda.[44] To get from the Outerword to Alphaville, however, one must travel through an empty void or zone (which indicates the true figure of the neutral). *Alphaville*'s city exists in its own truncated space, which is divided in northern and southern sectors. In sum, Godard's movie attempts to imagine a center to the dispersive networks of spectacular power but can only manage to do so by an imaginary detachment from geographical reality.

There is another example of the neutral at work in *Alphaville* that perhaps comes more readily to mind. It concerns the movie's mixing of genres, its collapse of the boundaries between high and mass culture. *Alphaville* is cluttered with quotes from the domain of film noir, science fiction serials, detective novels, and comic strips, besides its many references to philosophy, modernist literature, and surrealist poetry. Sometimes Godard reveals his sources openly, but not always. Lemmy Caution might be quoting from Pascal in a casual situation without our realizing it. Yet, the question lingers whether Godard's method has completely divested itself of a hierarchical view of culture; whether, that is, the Godard of *Alphaville* remains more an exponent of a modernist than a postmodernist tradition. Such is the question that Bochner will make us pose again to Godard.

> *It was 23 hours, 15 minutes Oceanic Time . . . when Natasha and I left Alphaville, along the peripheral boulevards.*[45]

Before we leave Alphaville, I need to insert a comment on the narrative structure of the science fiction genre. Lemmy Caution speaks of himself from another time, from an impossible future that is already past.[46] This curious extratemporal dimension of *Alphaville* is in itself a definitive aspect of the science fiction genre, as Fredric Jameson has convincingly argued.[47] From the previous account of *Alphaville* it has become clear that the movie does not provide the spectator with the full presence of some possible future—dystopic or otherwise. Indeed the past tense of *Alphaville* does not take a predictive cast; its events are portrayed as belonging to the already written, as belonging to the past.

This duplicity of the temporal structure of *Alphaville* is perhaps more pronounced than in most versions of the genre, but we can

encounter similar elements in *Alfaville,* which overlaps different historical moments within the synchronicity of a "future-present." Both *Alphaville* and *Alfaville* are somewhat ex-centric practices when it comes to the genre of science fiction (and utopian literature), but their references, nonetheless, are deliberate if not similar. It will be useful, therefore, to comprehend why science fiction develops its peculiar dialectic between the past and the future or, as Jameson has written, seeks to transform "our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come."[48]

First of all, the genre of science fiction is not an autonomous form; there is a historicity to its discursive practice. Science fiction emerged as a popular genre with Jules Verne in the late nineteenth century, at the same moment that another popular genre, the historical novel, began to lose its appeal. It was Gustave Flaubert who put the historical novel to rest by representing history as nothing but a monstrous collection of ill-assorted ideas, a catalog of clichés. What this *Flaubertization* of literature brought to the fore was the collapse of an evolutionary sense of time in bourgeois consciousness due to the reifying forces of the marketplace. Once the anchoring of the present in a determinate past, which had been fictionalized by the historical novel, became a structural impossibility in the realm of imagination, the future assumed the role of the past—hence, Jameson's definition of science fiction as representing the present as the past of a future.

The second step in Jameson's argument is to argue that the anticipatory nature of science fiction has undergone an alteration since the late nineteenth century. The capacity to extrapolate from a current state of technology and science into the future, to provide a "realistic" image of social change has become impossible in postmodernity. Our present, that is, represents the reverse side of Flaubert's inability to imagine historical progress as a linear process. The current crisis, however, is compounded by our inability to detach ourselves from the present in order to gain a perspective on the whole. If reality has assumed a simulacral aspect, then it is because we cannot place ourselves outside the framework of the globalized network of communication technologies and transnational institutions of late capitalism.[49]

Faced with this infinite—or, rather, *scaleless*—appearance of postmodernity, Jameson maintains that it will be necessary to develop elaborate "strategies of indirection." Such discursive strategies, or processes of cognitive mapping, insert themselves as catalyzing agents within the mediated realm of everyday experience. The "fictitious excess within rigid boundaries" (to steal Bochner's phrase) of such New Wave authors of science fiction as J.G. Ballard and Philip K. Dick, provide an example of such a strategy in practice.[50] Their texts present the reader with a kind of collage of reality, a

structural inversion of its signs, which have been transcoded into a proliferating range of neologisms. Science fiction operates, therefore, as a kind of subterfuge or decoy not dissimilar to the function of the magazine pieces of Bochner, which aim to install a partial distance, at best, between the reader and his or her own present. We are speaking, therefore, of a strategy that conjoins a method of distraction with a method of displacement or, in the language of the art world, with a crossing of the vectors of "Pop" and "Minimalism."[51] Such abrupt, if minor interruptions in the imaginary continuum of the social will deflect the intolerable nature of a seemingly "random human destiny" (Bochner). Yet this slight release of utopic energy in the present comes with the understanding that such discursive transgressions will come up against their own limitations in the real.

Dedicated to B.B.

Film can easily satisfy the demands of Brecht's alienation effect. It can be broken at any time. It progresses discontinuously.
—Mel Bochner[52]

If *Alfaville* can be said to give the reader a sure footing, it is in the act of criticizing Godard's presumed humanism. I have shown that a structural affinity exists between the two practices, an affinity that I have indicated by means of the related terms of the neutral and the utopic model. But Bochner sees at least one significant difference—*Alphaville* is inadequate, we might say, as a strategic model of indirection.

> The implications of Alphaville are moralistic. Godard opts for humanist values in the context of his projection of "technologism." He sees *Alphaville* as present and apocalyptic. . . . Godard's sociology is exceedingly romanticized. Man has already been displaced from the center of the universe.

In Bochner's view *alpha* is short for "eschatology." He argues that Godard retreats from the more radical implications of his filmic method into a "used up" morality. In the end Godard embraces the plot of redemption enacted by that outmoded figure, Lemmy Caution: "[Godard] asks that we forego theatricality and believe emotionally in the plight of a 'hero' and 'heroine' who are themselves in a state of disbelief." One might argue with the validity of this thesis (I have implied as much), but ultimately it is not its truth-value that stands in question. I am more interested in how this argument impacts on the one critical method that Bochner and Godard both inherited from the past, namely Brecht's alienation device.[53]

The lengthy literature on Godard has exhaustively detailed how

his films continuously interrupt their movement in order to comment upon their own actions. Such moments of rupture are frequent occurrences in *Alphaville:* a character will "forget" to act, for instance, and instead begins to recite from a book, or a flashing neon sign is cut into the flow of images. The intermittent snapshots that Lemmy takes of his surroundings form another example of such a device of discontinuity. The movie also interrupts itself on a more material level: a car chase scene is printed in negative, for instance, and the light on screen alternates suddenly between the murky, nighttime images of the streets and the bright, almost blinding, clarity of the interior shots.[54] Godard's movies, in other words, foreground the formal and material underpinnings of cinema, their techniques of constructing meaning, which shows the Brechtian pedigree of his style.

To Bochner, however, Godard did not go far enough. Bochner comes to this conclusion through a remarkable comparison of Godard's *Alphaville* to the films of Andy Warhol and Roger Corman.[55] Bochner's link between Pop art and Godard was not an unusual one. It had become a staple of the Godard literature by the midsixties. However, Bochner did not *identify* Godard as a Pop artist. To him, Pop signified a state of complete indifference and disaffection: "More recently artists such as Warhol have presented an attitude of passivity. In his movies Warhol demonstrates a preoccupation with the more fictive elements of 'crisis' by presenting everything as stereotype." Warhol is thus linked to another position on *Alfaville*'s game board, namely the square occupied by Flaubert. Flaubert stands in the ideological system of *Alfaville* for a cultural principle of paralysis and immobility. As Roland Barthes informed us in *Degree Zero of Writing,* the model of the cliché emerged in Flaubert's writing when bourgeois ideology lost its claims to universalism. Flaubert no longer represents the *dreams* but rather the rationalized *methods* of the bourgeois—he is doomed, it seems, to an endless rewriting of the same sentence. The *Flaubertization* of literature has come to stand for this process whereby art draws attention to its own artificiality, which is also the process of language's fragmentation into so many fragments of something that has been "already read, seen, done, experienced." *Alfaville,* Bochner's model of the fragmented movie, is like the broken text of Barthes's *S/Z:* a work of commentary that consists of interrupting the ideological totality of the text, denying its naturalness, hearing the voices of the *already written.*

But we are not quite done with Brecht. Beyond Godard, even beyond Warhol, Bochner claims, lies the utterly estranged yet infinitely commercial cinema of Roger Corman: "Unlike Godard, he makes no assessments of the 'contemporary malaise'; his concern is only with appearances and surfaces of things. The *Wild Angels*

motorcyclists are complete fabrications and only tangentially based in fact . . . the audience is distanced by banality and what Brecht refers to as the 'alienation effect.'"[56] Bochner argues in effect that Corman beats Godard at his own game. However, this appraisal of Corman cannot take the form of a negation of Godard, because negation would instate a new set of values. Hence, Bochner not only affirms the *negative* in Corman (i.e., its unreality) but also negates the *affirmative* side of Corman (i.e., unreality as the *nature* of the real).

Corman is symptomatic of the complete assimilation of the alienation device by the advertising and entertainment industry during the sixties. This fact has been noted by several theorists of postmodernity, but it was also clearly understood by Bochner and Graham. To Graham, for instance, Dean Martin became a symbol of the alienation of the alienation device from its former revolutionary project. What Martin expressed by the lassitude of his own performance, as Graham wrote in a brilliant text from 1967, was "an easygoing contempt for the medium of TV."[57] Bochner comes to a similar conclusion in another, equally humorous, piece called *Consumer Testing the Warren Report (Kennedy's Assassination as T.V. Serial).*[58]

Bochner takes aim at a television program aired in June 1967 that was moderated by Walter Cronkite. ("Moderated is the appropriate word," Bochner quips; "he is almost not there.") The program set out to question the findings of the Warren Report but ended up revealing several contradictions within its own televisual "reality," which suggested "the breakdown of history." The program rolled out a whole battery of testing equipment in order to verify the output of one "scientific" measurement after another. The elaborate circuit of simulations and tests were filmed in a *cinéma verité* style, but the camera's perspective only ended up mirroring itself *ad infinitum*:

> What did all the interviews, charts, graphs, tests and clocks add up to? The effect of this cross-examination of the Warren Report was a mental short circuit. The mind boggled at so many contradictory versions of one six-second period. The tests had no meaning outside their graphic representation. The content of the series was its own smooth technological surface. How can there be any "weight of evidence" when there is no evidence. It is impossible to substantiate the insubstantial. After four years all that remains are memory and fantasy. History has become its own fiction.[59]

And with this assertion Bochner reveals the modernist attitude of critical detachment as disempowered. Distance has become internalized within the media system, and the critical reflections of historical thought threaten to become gripped by a paralysis: Flaubert =

Warhol = Flaubert. How can we start thinking again in terms of their mutual difference? How does B(ochner) differ from B(recht)?

Alias William Burroughs

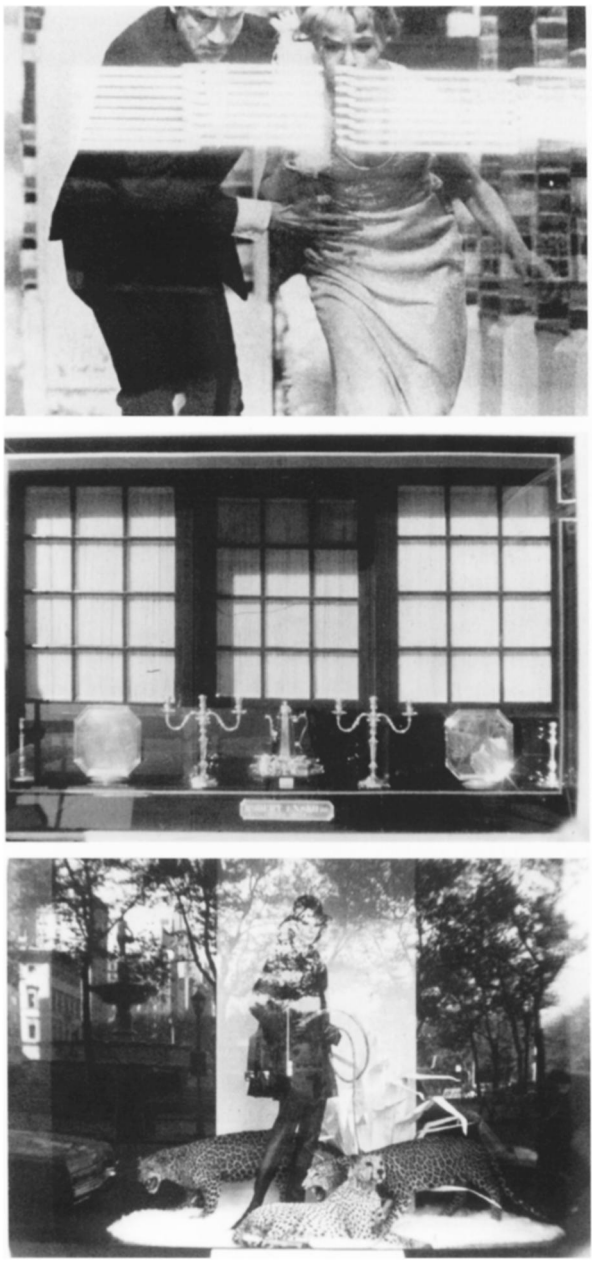
So I'm a public agent and don't know who I work for, get my instructions from street signs, newspapers and pieces of conversation.
—William S. Burroughs[60]

Bochner's axis of Flaubert-Warhol is not indicative of an indifference that reigns across the historical span but indicates that *Alfaville* is situated in the crossing of two divergent, historical moments. Utopic fiction, typically, emerges at such moments of historical crisis. *Alfaville* indicates its positioning within such transitional moments of history through its superimposed figures of the grid and the network. We might take the grid as a figure of modernism in its self-reflective mapping of the surface of the page onto itself. Clinging tightly to the page, *Alfaville*'s grid demarcates its own physical space, like the actress Anna Karina, who we perceive clutching the wall and her own dim reflection with outstretched arms. At the same time the frames of the grid also house the fragments of a reality that was formerly expelled from the purity of modernist art. As the eye of the reader/viewer courses across the page, it becomes entangled in a series of nonconvergent perspectives; these nodal points of attention do not add up. The stationary grid is, as it were, dispersed in the temporal, nontotalizable figure of the network, which, as we know, is the privileged emblem of the space of postmodernity.

Alfaville projects this dual figure of the grid and the network onto two other spaces as well; that is, the fields of architecture and technology. There is ample evidence of *Alfaville*'s investigation of the new dynamic of a postmodern space on the level of architecture. The images of the parking lot, the parking garage, and the expressway manifest a shift from the bounded grids of modernist space into the circulatory flows of postmodern space. These images are not unique in any way; they form but the way stations of a fully mobilized nation. As monuments of postmodernity they can only commemorate the instantaneous moments of dislocation.[61]

While Smithson and Graham were to seek out the "new" monuments of postindustrialism in the suburban landscape, in 1966 Bochner had already installed a principle of serial displacement within the spaces of the urban grid. The work I have in mind is a black-and-white movie called *New York Windows,* which Bochner made with the painter Robert Moskowitz. Although I cannot do full justice to this exceptional work at present, its relevance to our discussion will become evident from even a brief description.

New York Windows is a nine-minute movie consisting of nine



Mel Bochner and Robert Moskowitz. Stills from *New York Windows*, 1966. 16 mm black-and-white film.

separate shots of shop windows that were taken with a fixed frame and projected at silent speed, similar to the practice that Warhol followed in his early silent movies. The lens position alters only slightly from one shot to the next, allowing different possibilities of superimposition and overlap between the camera and window frame to occur. As the window surfaces appear on screen, one after the other, it becomes apparent that there is no narrative coherence to this passage of planes. Bochner does not map out a linear itinerary through the city, nor does he help us to orient ourselves within its urban topography. We are merely displaced from one reflective surface to the next, and the effect of disorientation is intensified by the dizzying superimposition of reflections, which at times make it impossible to gauge spatial relationships within the image. A strikingly similar effect is obtained in *Alfaville* in the photograph that is juxtaposed to the Ruscha and entitled "Barriers of Reflection."

While the architectural blocks of *Alfaville* connect to the spaces of the automobile and thus to slightly older figures of technological mobility, there is one image in *Alfaville* that refers to the newly emergent technologies of communication. This concerns the picture of a television set, which is wedged between the images of Anna Karina, captioned "Catatonia in the Capital of Pain," and William Burroughs. On the television screen a close-up view of a man's head appears within a black frame so that in this image the human figure, mediated by the television screen and diminished in scale, is set back a degree in relation to the surrounding photographs. In this photograph of "network television" it is possible to see the same slippage occur between the terms of the grid and the circuit, that is, as long as the relation between these two terms is understood to involve a displacement beyond a perspectival space of representation. Bochner chose the television photograph because it typified for him a "space-age" notion of design. In other words, the picture amounted to a highly futuristic vision in 1968, but there is a kind of futility or banality ingrained in this image. The image of a television set does

not have the same capacity to represent the relation between technology and the historical present as the mechanomorphic images of Futurism. The glowing surface of the television, with its disembodied "phenomena of consciousness," can only imply and not represent the logic of simulation. The reality of postmodernism is endlessly set back from the modernist distance of Brecht's realism.

Alfaville, as noted before, does not pass moral judgment on its historical moment; it thinks both progress and catastrophe at once.[62] So we might expect that it will juxtapose the dystopic model of Godard's Alpha 60 with an alternative, utopian model. Exactly such a prophetic vision is found in M.L. Minsky's model of a cybernetic machine, as quoted in *Alfaville*:[63] "As the machine improves both itself and its model of itself, we shall begin to see all the phenomena associated with the terms 'consciousness,' 'intuition' and 'intelligence' . . . it is unreasonable to think machines . . ." The cut in the text is made by Bochner himself, and it overlays the passage with a significance that is other than the original intention of the author. Minsky's sentence continues in the next block of *Alfaville*'s grid, but the interruption underscores the ambivalence of the negative term "unreasonable" within its rather euphoric context. Indeed, the initial "protocol" of an intelligent, self-realizing machine descends into a radically different scenario of control in the remainder of the sentence: ". . . could become nearly as intelligent as we are and then stop, or to suppose we will always be able to compete with them."

This forms the proper moment to introduce the rather surprising source of Bochner's cut-up technique: William Burroughs. Little of Burroughs's more delirious effects are visible in *Alfaville,* yet it is worthwhile to briefly investigate the theory behind Burroughs's method.[64] The writer developed the cut-up device as a mode of resistance to the mediation of the everyday in a consumer society, which as he puts it, lives in addiction to images. Befitting this overall thematic of the work, Burroughs's worldview assumes an outspoken character of paranoia. He likens the channels of the media to the carriers of a viral information code against which the spectator is virtually powerless. The virus-image infects its host, the consumer, in order to form the subject into a replica of itself. The cut-up forms, in other words, a kind of inoculation device against this replication of the code. The spatial figure of this fragmentation and restructuring of the code is Burroughs's literary invention of the so-called interzone, which we might compare to Marin's figure of the neutral, nonplace of utopics. The function of the interzone in Burroughs's writing is not to establish a fictive region where all hierarchies and incongruities between disparate systems of representation are to be annulled, but where they might clash and collide.[65] "Systems of tentative paralysis," explains one of the captions in *Alfaville.* Yet the staging of such points of rupture, of blockage and overloading

of the network of information, always remains a "mythological" exercise, as Burroughs himself would quickly admit. The conditioning of subjects cannot be canceled altogether; in fact, it is possible to argue, that such moments of momentary breakdown are essential to the recursive, self-regulating system of a global communications network.[66]

The hyperproductive imagination of conspiracy theories in Burroughs's fiction can be explained as a compensatory mechanism, which stems from the author's incapacity to encompass the global network of power and control, to form an adequate representation of the present-day totality of multinational capitalism. His work, in other words, may be taken as emblematic of the kind of schizoid consciousness, which Jameson has identified as a dominant feature of postmodern existence. It is precisely the incapacity of a writer's imagination to represent this global network of power and control that belongs to present-day multinational capitalism that produces conspiracy theories.[67] Particularly in the so-called New Wave science fiction of the sixties, which was influenced by Burroughs, such paranoia would reach a fevered pitch, whereby the "circuits and networks of some putative computer network are narratively mobilized by labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but deadly interlocking and competing information agencies in a complexity often beyond the capacity of the normal reading mind."[68] Such manic fictions obviously remain far from the more placid surfaces of Bochner's work. *Consumer Testing the Warren Report* presented a more benign form of the schizoid state of mind induced by the mediascape of the midsixties. And when in *Alfaville* Bochner assumes the alias of Burroughs, he plays the role of the secret agent who struggles with an amused nonchalance within and against the fragmented discourses of reality. What holds between the methods of Bochner and Burroughs, however, is that their undercover operations, or strategies of indirection, will remain interminable because, as another subversive agent of the printed media liked to say, we are forever placed in-formation.[69]

Postscript: The Writing on the Wall

The time has drawn near for me to extract a lesson from *Alfaville*. Perhaps it seems contradictory in light of the previous discussion to suggest there is a pedagogic aspect to Bochner's work, but we need not confuse the situation of a lesson with the moral of a lesson. Furthermore, I have established Bochner's interest in the didactic methods of Brecht and therefore it is to the example of the German playwright that I shall once more turn.

While attending the Carnegie Institute of Technology, Bochner witnessed the performance of one of Brecht's "learning pieces," which form a kind of play in process, a continuous rehearsal that is subject

to role swapping and audience interaction. All the notes, comments, and records that issued from each performance compounded the play in its entirety or, rather, embodied the play in its practical transformation. There is no perfect representation of such a play (whether on stage or in the playwright's mind). The play is in the actual staging of the play during which the sets are built up and broken down again only to begin the same cycle the next day.

A utopic model of artistic practice follows a similar approach, and during the years after *Alfaville* Bochner's work was to increasingly resemble a kind of Brechtian theater through its use of movable props and the application of texts to floors, walls, and windows. Of course, it is the spectator who now stars in the role of the epic actor. In short, *Alfaville*'s acts of mapping and narrating the ideological contradictions of reality begin to take place *for real.* But this sketch of the "lesson" of *Alfaville*'s remains too generalized. We can be more specific.

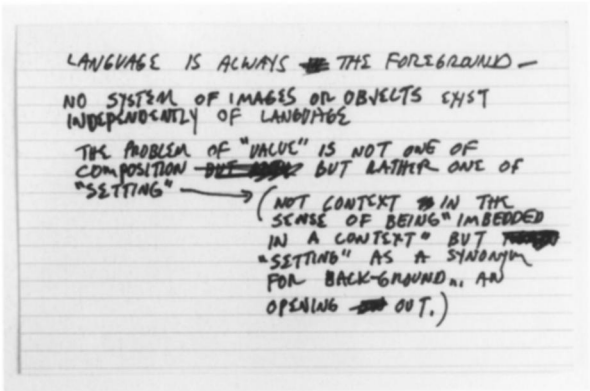
Bochner has provided two answers to the question how *Alfaville* might feed into the present. First, the artist felt vindicated that Godard's political transformation after May 1968 only confirmed his original view of the French film director as a humanist. We might agree with this appraisal of the "Dziga Vertov" episode in Godard's career or not, but we will still remain at the moral level of the lesson. The second answer, in my opinion, is more interesting: no lesson ever exceeds its situation. In retrospect, Bochner considered it highly felicitous that *Alfaville* was published in May 1968, and if I kept this historical circumstance in the background of my previous account, it has informed my approach from the outset. The confluence of historical events around May 1968 was unforeseeable, yet *Alphaville*'s accidental date of publication nonetheless dramatized for Bochner the immanent character of his critical strategy. Likewise, I find it significant that the critical method I have adopted, namely Marin's model of a utopic practice, was itself the by-product of May 1968. In other words, Marin's *Utopics* not only offers us an effective instrument of historical analysis, but the text also understands *itself* as a product of its own historical situation. Marin's first investigation into the semiological play of utopic spaces was conducted in the framework of a seminar at Nanterre during the "revolutionary festival" of May 1968. Marin's introduction to his book describes these circumstances in a vivid manner: "For a few weeks historical time was suspended, all institutions and laws were again challenged in and by discourse, and networks of communication were opened among those immersed in one way or another in the experience"; yet this discourse, he adds, "brought those who spoke to such a point of excess that they could do nothing but misjudge the discourse that animated them."[70] And just as suddenly as this extratemporal moment exploded into being, it came to an end—

Mel Bochner. *Language Is Not Transparent,* 1970. Chalk and paint on wall, 72 x 48". Installation in the Virginia Dwan Gallery, New York, 1970.

its neutral spaces of disputation reoccupied by the former institutions and authorities of "neutrality."[71]

Around 1970 Bochner came to sense that the dispute Conceptual art maintained with its own discursive and institutional spaces of exhibition often concealed its own authoritarian stance of neutrality.[72] Bochner was particularly suspicious of certain claims that linguistic and social theory could function in the art world as a nonmediated and universal language of communication. This zero degree of language, which appeared in some quarters of Conceptual art, passes itself off as "a hideout for data"—a phrase that Barthes coined for Alain Robbe-Grillet but that is appropriated by Bochner in *Alfaville*. Such a model of a neutral language shuns the utopic practice of disputation, not to mention some of those other "problems of language" that are enumerated in *Alfaville:* "tautology, conundrum, diffusion, paradox, ambiguity, contradiction, vicious circle."

The antagonistic speech of May 1968 overran the reality of Paris in a way that *Alfaville* could only intimate, in a negative and indirect manner, from its place within the mass media. But once the public dispute was stilled, Bochner would commemorate the event within the transformed setting of the art world. In June 1970, during the last of a series of celebrated exhibitions of conceptual art called *Language* at the Virginia Dwan Gallery in New York, Bochner wrote a sentence in chalk on a section of wall painted black: *1. Language Is Not Transparent* . . . As if written on a school board, the letters were slightly smudged, and one could imagine that the lesson was to be erased at the end of the day. Even the blackboard seemed improvised. The bottom edge gave way to rivulets of paint running down the wall as if imitating the hastily scrawled messages from two years before.[73]



Mel Bochner. *Notecards (Excerpts from Speculation)*, 1969. Pen and ink on notecard, 5 x 8".

Bochner's intervention in the space of the exhibition presented a comment *on* a situation (i.e., the language of conceptualism) in a situation (i.e., the gallery space).[74] The comment itself was culled from his own notebook jottings recording the twists and turns of thought, developing maze-like patterns that are overlain with deletions and additions. The note cards are written black on white, but the text written on the wall appeared in reverse, white on black. As affirmative statement written in the negative, it points once more to the empty place of the neutral. The utterance turns as much on its own formal content as it does on its enunciative setting.

"Everything has been said before," Alpha 60 declared, but what truly *counts* is where and when something is said, in what setting and under what conditions. If language is not transparent, then it is because discourse cannot detach itself from ideology, whether as the zero degree of conceptual art or the excessive speech of May 1968. Both occurrences misjudge the nature of the discourse that is spoken, but Bochner's writing brings the latter into play against the former. His marking of the space, which mimics both the positions of spontaneity and authority, performs an *ideological critique of ideology*—the true mark, as Marin observes, of a utopic practice. His writing is set in the present tense, yet it commemorates a spent desire as much as it seems to anticipate a possible future. The counting might be suspended, but the inventory is incomplete, for the future will have to be spoken in the event and not in its advance.

Notes

1. Unless noted otherwise, all citations are from Mel Bochner, "Alfaville, Godard's Apocalypse," *Arts Magazine* 41 (Summer 1967): 14–17.

2. Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," in *The Semiotic Challenge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 128.

3. The misspelled title *Alfaville,* which now serves to distinguish Bochner's work from Godard's film, was the result of a typesetting mistake.

4. For an overview of Bochner's work, see Brenda Richardson's survey in *Mel Bochner: Number and Shape* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1976); and the catalog *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1995), which contains a number of excellent essays on the artist.

5. See Dan Graham, "My Works for Magazine Pages: 'A History of Conceptual Art,'" in *Rock My Religion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), xviii–xx.

6. For a general inventory of such works, see Anne Rorimer, "Siting the Page: Exhibiting Works in Publications—Some Examples of Conceptual Art in the USA," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art,* ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 11–26.

7. Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1984), 10.

8. A slightly revised version of the text, without the images or the grid, was published in an anthology on Godard. See Toby Mussman, ed., *Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Dutton and Co., 1968), 206–212. The artist considers all other appearances of the work to be illustrations of the original *event* of publication.

9. We might note that the deconstructive play of *Alfaville*'s grid between the terms of narrative and place also determined Bochner's interest in Minimalism. For instance, in a review of Sol LeWitt's show at the Virginia Dwan Gallery in 1966, Bochner observes: "Perceptual phenomena: indeterminate sequence, infinite invention, coordinate disorder. . . . The accumulation of facts collapses perception. The indicated sum of these simple series is irreducible complexity. And impenetrable chaos." "Sol LeWitt," *Arts Magazine* 40 (September/October 1966): 61. It is doubtful, however, whether LeWitt subscribed to the same degree of narrative disorder that Bochner read into his work.

10. Once more I am making a direct reference to Bochner's view of Minimalism: "What these [Minimalist] artists hold in common is the attitude that Art—from the root *artificial*—is unreal, constructed, invented, predetermined, intellectual, make-believe, objective, contrived, useless. . . . It is unlifelike, not spontaneous, exclusive. It does not move." Mel Bochner, "Primary Structures: A Declaration of a New Attitude as Revealed by an Important Current Exhibition," *Arts Magazine* 40 (June 1966): 34.

11. Dan Graham, "The Artist as Bookmaker: The Book as Object," *Arts Magazine* 41 (Summer 1967): 23.

12. Barthes, 109.

13. Epigraph to artist's notebook of 1966. Cited by Richard S. Field, "Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible," in *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible,* 26.

14. My discussion of *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* is indebted to Scott Rothkopf's recent essay, "'Photography Cannot Record Abstract Ideas' and Other Misunderstandings," in *Mel Bochner: Photographs 1966–1969* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

15. "I suddenly knew that the issues of literalism and anti-illusionism that I had been thinking about had disappeared." Bochner as cited in Sasha Newman, "The Photo Pieces," in *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible,* 118.

16. Camilla Gray, *The Russian Experiment in Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962).

17. The fact that Bochner knew the *Arkhitektonics* in only their mediated—that is, photographic—form would only have strengthened their connection to his own photo works.

18. Mel Bochner, interview by author in the artist's studio, New York, 21 June 2002.

19. See Marin, *Utopics*, passim.

20. For instance, Thomas More feigns not to be the actual narrator of *Utopia,* but only the recorder of a conversation, while the country Utopia represents a barely disguised inversion of his contemporary England.

21. Bochner, interview. I have no room to discuss Bochner's other compilation pieces; however it is significant that Bochner admits to having wittingly falsified certain quotes, thus mobilizing the same utopic ambivalence of fiction and history, author and narrator that is to be found in the works of his beloved author Jorge Luis Borges. On Borges, see Marin's chapter on the "Utopia of the Map" in *Utopics*, 233–237.

22. In his semiological analysis of Thomas More's *Utopia* Marin exposes the so-called "topics of rupture" between the literal, narrative space of More's text and the narrative fiction of Utopian society. Marin concludes that it is impossible to draw a perfect map of the economic and political reality of Utopia, since "utopia as figure within discourse refers to what is not of the discursive realm: it opens onto the finality of discourse." Marin, 197.

23. The following discussion draws loosely on Marin's chapter on "Of Plural Neutrality and Utopia" in *Utopics.* For a more rigorous discussion of the neutral term in relation to semiotic theory, see Fredric Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse" (1977), in *The Ideologies of Theory,* vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Rosalind Krauss, of course, was the first to propose the logic of neutralization as a critical tool of analysis in the field of art history.

24. Mel Bochner, "Seriality and Photography," unpublished catalog statement for *Art in Series* (artist's archive, 1967), n.p.

25. Dan Graham, "Models & Monuments," *Arts Magazine* 41 (March 1967): 34. Graham's phrase derives from Karlheinz Stockhausen.

26. Bochner's interest in Muybridge, which he shared with Graham, has been extensively documented.

27. As cited in Richard Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 54. We might compare Godard's comment to Bochner's own observation that "Traditionally the film has been used in the manner of the 'slice-of-life' novel. The early names for film give clues to this aspiration—vitascope, vitagraph, bioscope, kinetoscope, kinetograph, motion-picture. Although an illusion of motion occurs during the viewing of a film, the actual phenomena itself is [sic] many still photographs. Still photographs are taken of an event or thing in series (one after another) at regular intervals of time." Mel Bochner, *Stills: Notes on Cinema*, 1967 (artist's archive, New York).

28. See, for instance, "Interview with Jean-Luc Godard" (1962), in *Godard on Godard*, trans. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 185: "The film is a series of blocks. You just take them and set them side by side."

29. Bochner, *Stills.*

30. Jean-Luc Godard, "Let's Talk about *Pierrot*" (1965), in *Godard on Godard,* 230.

31. One essay by Michel Butor that comes to mind here is "The Book as Object," which "defamiliarizes" the literary text by pointing to such supplementary forms

as the conventions of layout, the use of margins, the function of glosses and notes, besides comparing literature to other textual genres, such as technical manuals, dictionaries, catalogs, inventories, phone books, advertising leaflets, comic books, and so on. Michel Butor, "The Book as Object" (1964), in *Inventory* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968).

32. So, for instance, Godard would come to state in 1962: "I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them." *Godard on Godard,* 171.

33. Jean-Luc Godard, "Screenplay: Alphaville," in *Alphaville, A Film by Jean-Luc Godard*, trans. Peter Whitehead (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 19.

34. The British writer Peter Cheney (1896–1951) invented the character of Lemmy Caution. Constantine had starred in many films based on the Caution figure, such as *Les femmes s'en balancent* (1953), *Ca va barder* (1954), *Je suit un sentimental* (1955), and *Lemmy pour les dames* (1961). Besides Constantine, Godard employed two other character actors on *Alphaville* who were equally at home in the B-movie genre, namely Akim Tamiroff and Howard Vernon. The latter plays the evil Professor von Braun, the inventor of Alpha 60, in Godard's movie, and was previously known as the villain in Fritz Lang's *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960) and as the central personage in *The Awful Dr. Orloff* (1961), a movie which kicked off the career of the Spanish horror director Jesse Franco. Godard placed Anna Karina in the role of heroine opposite Constantine. The film critics Jean-André Fieschi and Jean-Louis Comolli make a cameo appearance as the Professors Heckell and Jeckell. Godard himself appeared as a police officer.

35. One of the more significant motifs in the movie is Lemmy Caution's acquisition of Paul Eluard's *The Capital of Pain* from the hands of another secret agent. Caution interprets the poetry collection as a secret message—some passages had been underlined by the former owner—but is unable to "decode" the message. Caution has Natasha read the following lines from the poem: "We live in the void of our metamorphoses/But that echo that runs through all the day . . ./That echo beyond time, despair and the caress . . ./Are we close to, or far away from our conscience." This passage, like the next citation Natasha reads—"Your eyes have returned from an arbitrary land . . . where no one has known the essence of a glance . . ."—provides a literary equivalent for the kind of deterritorialization or *dépaysement* that Caution (and the spectator) undergoes in the course of the movie.

36. The first, systematic attempt to define film noir, by Borde and Chaumeton, emphasized a force of disintegration as the central principle of the genre. "The aim of *film noir* was to create a specific alienation." Raymonde Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, "Towards a Definition of *Film Noir,*" in *Film Noir Reader,* ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996), 25. The notion of film *noir* was an invention of French film criticism during the later forties. Bochner does not make this relationship in his *Alfaville,* but Godard would have associated film noir with a mode of social critique, since that was how the genre was perceived, at first, in France. The morally ambivalent, yet rugged individualism of the detective type was viewed as a redeeming feature of film noir's otherwise bleak and cynical view of a world gone corrupt. By the 1960s the genre of film noir had run its course, and in Godard's *Alphaville* it functions as one more empty cliché.

37. This passage stems from a detective novel and is read aloud as Lemmy enters the seedy hotel where he makes contact with another secret agent. Godard describes this location as "a small suburban hotel dimly lit in contrast to the orgy of light in the city." Godard, "Original Treatment of Alphaville," in *Alphaville* (1968), 87.

38. Alpha 60's seemingly mechanical voice is that of a war veteran whose vocal

chords were destroyed and had to learn to speak anew by using his diaphragm.

39. Jean-Luc Godard, in *Alphaville,* 81–82.

40. *Two or Three Things I Know about Her* (1966) will further develop this theme of the degradation of the utopian model of modernist architecture in the transformed reality of consumer society. Graham has cited this film, among others, as an influence on his *Homes for America.*

41. Godard, "Screenplay: Alphaville," 45.

42. It is through Alpha 60's interrogation of Lemmy Caution that the computer's brain circuits achieve something akin to a phenomenological consciousness of time and begin to self-destruct: "Time is a stream which carries me along . . . but I am Time . . . it is the tiger which tears me apart . . . yet, I, too, am the tiger." Phenomenology, of course, argues that subjectivity in its split existence between an individuality (i.e., "I") and a generality (i.e., "Time") must learn to live both parts together, without falling apart, as in Alpha 60's final, self-destructive episode. Compare Merleau-Ponty on this *ek-stase* of subjectivity: "time is the foundation and measure of our spontaneity, and the power of outrunning and of 'nihilating' which dwells within us and is ourselves, is given to us with temporality and life. . . . We are not in some incomprehensible way an activity joined to a passivity, an automatism surmounted by a will, a perception surmounted by a judgment, but wholly active and wholly passive, because we are the upsurge of life." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 428.

43. Note the deliberately "bad" special effects of the movie, which also have the historical function of recalling the B-movie genre of fifties science fiction. To Godard's contemporary audience, the relatively crude decors of earlier science fiction movies would seem equally "unbelievable" in their attempt to visualize a technological society of the future as *Alphaville*'s own tongue-in-cheek projection of a cybernetic tomorrow.

44. Alpha 60: "Nor is there in the so-called Capitalist world, or Communist world, any malicious intent to suppress men through the power of ideology or materialism, but only the natural aim of all organizations to increase their rational structure." Godard, "Screenplay: Alphaville," 45.

45. Godard, "Screenplay: Alphaville," 79.

46. "*Alphaville* is the film of *Dis-location.* . . . The 'past-future' tense of which Godard speaks is our *present situation.*" Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1967), 90–91.

47. Fredric Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?" in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* ed. Brian Wallis (Boston: Godine, 1984), 239–252.

48. Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia," 245.

49. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

50. I have no space to develop this argument, but Jameson's model of science fiction is indebted to Marin's semiological model of utopics. This essay makes only a first tentative step in the direction of mapping the complexity of this utopic field within the artistic practice of the sixties. Bochner applies the phrase of "fictitious excess" to Roger Corman's *Wild Angels,* but it would seem equally applicable to the language of New Wave science fiction as well. I shall briefly return to this sense of a semiological play of language, or *utopics,* of science fiction in Burroughs's figure of the *interzone.*

51. *Alfaville* incorporates Edward Ruscha's photograph of a parking lot, which forms an obvious precursor of such a dialectic between Pop and Minimalism.

52. Mel Bochner, "Art in Process—Structures," *Arts Magazine* 40 (September/October 1966): 38.

53. James Meyer was the first to address this Brechtian aspect of Bochner's work. See his "The Second Degree: Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art," in *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible*, 95–106.

54. Godard shot the movie on high-speed black-and-white film, with the aperture opened all the way, so that he could shoot the nighttime streets of Paris without additional illumination. Sometimes the camera was able to register only a few flecks of light, causing the movie to cast the auditorium in utter darkness. See also Bochner's inventory of "Shots" in *Alfaville*.

55. Bochner remembers that Godard was often billed together with Warhol in rerun theaters during the sixties. Bochner, interview.

56. Bochner shares an interest in the work of Roger Corman with Robert Smithson. See Smithson's "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 74, on the topic of *Wild Angels* and Corman's "sense of dissimulation."

57. Dan Graham, "Dean Martin/Entertainment as Theater," in *Rock My Religion*, 80.

58. Mel Bochner, "Consumer Testing the Warren Report: Kennedy's Assassination as T.V. Serial," *West Side News* (6 July 1967), n.p. The *West Side News* was a magazine that mostly printed political commentaries and was produced by a friend of Bochner. While "Consumer Testing" makes its argument in a fairly analytical fashion, another compilation text exists that follows a more devious strategy of indirection.

59. "The Beach Boys—'100%'" was published in *Arts Magazine* 41 (March 1967): 24. This text reads as a continuous narrative, but was constructed from the press release material of the Beach Boys. Lists of song titles and biographical data (birth date, birthplace, hair, eyes, etc.) are pasted together with excerpts from several interviews. The "essay" carries the subtitle "The World Is Just a Big California." Bochner was interested in the Beach Boys as a kind of "mannerist" phenomenon, with its implementation of the artifices of falsetto voices and the new technique of multitrack mixing. The result is likened to "computerized pop, mechanized music" in the text, but Bochner was not presenting an argument "for" or "against" the Beach Boys. The content functioned as a distraction, which inserts the reader within a discursive space of contradiction; that is, the text dissimulates its own "reality."

59. Bochner, "Consumer Testing the Warren Report."

60. William Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, as cited by Scott Bukatman in *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Post-Modern Science Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 96.

61. Ed Ruscha's photograph of the parking lot reminds of Robert Smithson's own tour of such "sidereal" spaces, which in addition to Graham's *Homes for America*, forms another subtext of *Alfaville*: "That monumental parking lot divided the city in half, turning it into a mirror and a reflection—there was nothing interesting or even strange about that flat monument, yet it echoed a kind of cliché idea of infinity." Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of the Passaic, New Jersey" (1967), in *Writings*, 56.

62. See Jameson on the imperative to think the "cultural evolution of late capitalism dialectically, as catastrophe and progress all together." Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 47.

63. During the sixties M.L. Minsky worked in the artificial intelligence department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

64. Burroughs's biological metaphor of a viral *intrusion* of the media message within the body forms the antipode to McLuhan's notion of technology as an extrusion of the body's own neural network. See Bukatman, 70–72.

65. See Bukatman, 163.

66. Robert Smithson, for instance, claims in "Entropy and the New Monuments" (1966), in *Writings*, 9, that the great blackout of 1965 in New York created a mood of "euphoria," while Marshall McLuhan in the *Medium Is the Massage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 148, cites the same event as evidence of how the media alters every instant of our lives.

67. On this point, see Jameson, *Postmodernism*.

68. Jameson, *Postmodernism,* 38.

69. I have lifted the phrase from Dan Graham, "Subject Matter," in *Rock My Religion*.

70. Marin, *Utopics*, 4.

71. Marin differentiates the *neutral* place, which figures as the "path and movement of contradiction," from the authoritarian position of neutrality, which usurps the place of the neutral by acting as the dominant arbiter of social conflict. Against the infinite judgment of the neutral, neutrality sets the final limits of the law.

72. The terms are mine and not Bochner's. For more on this topic see Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–69: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–143.

73. Bochner, interview.

74. Bochner, interview.